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ABSTRACT

The issue of black college students and the impact of racism and their ethnic background on their academic success is explored. The black college student is seen as possessing a unique contextual self, borne of a heritage that values, to a very high degree, the family and other people that significantly impact the lives of those with whom they interact and relate. Because black students often come from a less than desirable social, financial, and developmental background, the college environment in which they find themselves is perceived as unfriendly, unwelcome, or dangerous. It is suggested that the black student requires a great deal of "catching up" attention that augments the traditional student services. Actions that can help in nullifying these adverse circumstances include: (1) providing more follow-up of the recruiting efforts of potential black students, including financial aid counseling; (2) providing developmental academic instruction; (3) skill-building orientation activities; (4) hiring more black faculty and requiring them to serve in a variety of roles; and (5) cataloging and collecting black student resources and actively encouraging programs and events which celebrate the ethnic heritage of the black college student. Contains 12 references. (GLR)

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A Systematic Approach to the Integration of Black College Students

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"Brown v. The Board of Education Of Topeka," the landmark case that in 1954 ordered the desegregation of public school systems, **could** inspire mandatory bussing of students as a means of forcing integration past historically established population lines; it **could** render the "separate but equal" nature of the earlier "Plessy v. Ferguson" case virtually null and void. What it could **not** do was mandate a change in the public conscience.

While it would be difficult to prove that true racial harmony and equality have ever existed, the ghosts of violent, vehement racism 50, 70, 100 years old are beginning to rattle about America's college and university campuses again, creating an eerie, truly frightful atmosphere in which we expect all students to grow and develop. Minority students, in general, and the black student population specifically are becoming the targets of increasingly numerous and ever more salacious verbal and physical attacks. The atmosphere is far from inviting.

Pounds (1987) argues that black students come to college with unique backgrounds and experiences that, for the most part, are largely ingnored by, and almost certainly are unappreciated by, campus administrators. Citing the work of Wright (1984), Stikes (1984), and Tinto (1975), Pounds says that in many cases, black students will be first generation college students. This will significantly impact the likelihood of success of black students throughout their stay (Astin, 1982).

She goes on to say that many black students come to college

academically underprepared, and at a financial disadvantage, due in part to traditionally poor elementary and secondary education in predominantly black communities (pp. 28-29). Again, Astin (1982) has shown that "academic preparation at the time of college entry proved to have more frequent and stronger relationships to most outcome measures than any other single . . . variable," (p. 92) and that financial aid can significantly impact minority student persistence (pp. 107-109).

Black students will likely be less satisfied with and less involved in campus life, and will be either negatively affected, or not affected at all, by the college environment. Furthermore, it has been shown that many black students feel a sense of isolation and alienation while on predominantly white campuses, and that black students have a tendency towards anger and despair in situations where they have a lack of trust in the people around them (Willie & McCord, 1972).

A number of authors have found differences betweeen black students and white students (Branch-Simpson, 1984; Pounds, 1987; Rodgers, 1989). Although the emphasis on the vast similarities between the two would be more valid, and certainly more of a movement toward racial harmony, an examination of reported differences might prove illuminating. While Stikes (1984) has said that "racial discrimination is [the] fundamental difference between blacks and whites in society and on the college campus" (p. 103), Bennett (1989) identifies a number of specific behavior-related differences.

She says that students who use black vernacular may seem less intelligent or uneducated. Blacks who use "the term 'nigger' [are] distressing to whites" (p. 46). She says that black students have a unique nonverbal style, as well as a unique time orientation, with black students using "polychronic" time, where "schedules are invisible" (p. 48).

She suggests a difference in social values described above, and a difference in learning styles, citing the work of Shade (1982), who found that black students' "high context" nature, which reveals itself in the polychronic time orientation and strong family identification and orientation, often conflicts with the low context atmosphere of the college campus, where classes must start and end at specified times, and where students are encouraged to develop in a direction that most often moves them developmentally away from their family of origin.

As a means of minimizing the perception of "difference," and of healing the wounds of an unsavory history of subtle and overt racism, Pounds (1987) provides the following strategies for effective programs for black students:

1. Extra effort should be made to follow-up recruiting efforts of potential black students; extensive and intensive financial aid counseling should be available both for the student and for their family.
2. Provide developmental academic instruction. Pounds (1987) suggests offering remedial

courses taught by full professors, self-paced modules, instructional laboratories, and a comprehensive tutoring program, using peers as well as academics.

3. Skill-building Orientation activities

4. Making a concerted effort to hire black faculty, and require them to serve in a variety of roles, including formal mentor relationships, informal counselors, and academic advisors.

5. Catalogue and collect black student resources and actively encourage participation in and the creation of programs and events which celebrate the ethnic heritage of the black college student, being ever mindful of the need to bring to light commonalities shared by all people. (pp. 35-37)

The black college student, then, can be classified as possessing a unique contextual self, borne of a heritage that values, to a very high degree, the family and other people that significantly impact the lives of those with whom they interact and relate. Coming from an often less than desirable social, financial, and developmental background, and coming to an environment that is perceived as unfriendly, unwelcome, or dangerous, the black student requires a great deal of "catch-

up" attention to augment the "catch-on" aspects of traditional student services.

The conscious attempt to culturally diversify staff and faculty, as well as the student population, will create role models of every kind for every kind of student. There is evidence that even the disproportionate hiring of white students into leadership positions in college and university residence halls impacts black students' perceptions of their own ability to excell in the same job (Grubbs, 1985; Ketchum, 1988).

There is ample evidence to suggest that a systematic, well-planned approach to specialized student services for the black student population is highly desirable. The value to the student, developmentally, sociologically, vocationally, and psychologically, can not be overstated. The value to the college or university, in terms of increased understanding and acceptance of other values and beliefs on the parts of all its students, as well as the simple exposure to other realities, is perhaps higher education's greatest, and most urgent task.

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